

BUFFALOBERRY PATCH

BY GREG FREEMAN, DEPARTMENT NEWS EDITOR



ED BRY

Sage grouse, found in southwestern North Dakota, are declining nationwide.

Wildlife Action Plan Receives Approval

North Dakota's Wildlife Action Plan, a strategic plan designed to identify and help fish and wildlife species in decline, has been approved by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

For the past five years, Congress has provided states with supplemental funding through the State Wildlife Grant program to conserve species that typically receive no monetary support. The SWG program does not take away from current game management programs, but instead complements programs already in place, and fills in gaps where funding has been lacking.

As a condition of accepting these funds, all 50 states were required to develop a Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy – now called Wildlife Action Plan – and submit it to the USFWS by October 1, 2005. The Wildlife Action Plan is intended to identify and focus on species of conservation priority, yet address each state's full array of wildlife.

"This benefits all species of fish and wildlife, not only those at potential risk,"

said Terry Steinwand, North Dakota Game and Fish Department director.

According to Steinwand, the SWG program represents an ambitious endeavor that allows states to take a more active role in keeping species from becoming threatened or endangered in the future. "North Dakota's Wildlife Action Plan will provide much of the framework for working toward that goal and preserving an important part of our state's heritage for future generations," he said.

North Dakota's Wildlife Action Plan, available on the Game and Fish website at gf.nd.gov, contains information on species of conservation priority, threats that are causing species to decline, and actions for conserving them.

Game and Fish Department nongame biologists started developing the plan in 2002, and received input from land management agencies, tribal interests, nongovernmental organizations, researchers, experts and private citizens.

Evaluating the 2005 Deer Gun Season

A record number of licenses translated into a record number of deer harvested during the 2005 deer gun hunting season.

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department allocated 145,600 deer gun licenses for the 2005 season, and all but 4,300 were issued to hunters. Harvest survey data reveals nearly 99,600 deer were taken during the gun season. Combined with bow, muzzle-loader and youth seasons, the harvest was more than 100,000 deer, according to Randy Kreil, Department wildlife division chief.

The overall hunter success rate of 76 percent during 2005 was 2 percent higher than 2004, and about average over the past 15 years.

Hunter success for antlered white-tailed deer was 75 percent, and antlerless whitetail was 74 percent.

Mule deer buck success was 78 percent, while mule deer doe hunters had a success rate of 83 percent.

Youth deer season hunters had an overall success rate of 44 percent, and muzzle-loader season hunters had a success rate of 49 percent.



RON WILSON

Deer Applications Available in May

Applications for the 2006 deer gun, youth and muzzle-loader seasons will be available by about May 15. The deadline for applying is June 7.

Applicants can access the North Dakota Game and Fish Department's website at gf.nd.gov to submit a lottery application online, or to print an application for mailing.

Lottery and gratis applications will be available at Game and Fish offices, county auditors and license vendors. You can also apply by calling 800-406-6409.

Bighorns Comfortable in Badlands

Eighteen bighorn sheep captured in Montana's Missouri River Breaks and released in western North Dakota in mid-January are staying within one mile of the release site.

"This tells me they are content and comfortable with their new surroundings," said Brett Wiedmann, North Dakota Game and Fish Department bighorn sheep biologist, Dickinson. "The sheep are doing extremely well ... I couldn't be happier."

Originally, 19 bighorns from Montana's Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge were released in North Dakota, but one ewe that dispersed from the band was killed by a mountain lion.

Trapping efforts were spearheaded by Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks personnel to supplement wild bighorn populations in North Dakota and Wyoming. "Removing sheep from this specific area has been something that I have been advocating for over 10 years, so it was gratifying to see this project come about, and for the sheep to go into similar habitat in North Dakota to start a new population," said Mark Sullivan, FWP wildlife biologist in Malta, Montana. "I think this operation will be as beneficial for our sheep population as it will be for yours, since removing these sheep will improve the habitat for the remaining animals, which will keep them healthier."

Wiedmann said the Missouri River Breaks sheep, managed by Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, is one of the premier bighorn herds in North America. "Getting bighorn sheep from Montana is the biggest step taken



Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks played a vital role in the release of bighorn sheep last winter in North Dakota.

in our sheep program since 1956," he said. "We need to compliment them on their sheep management ... we're taking advantage of their bounty."

A half-century ago, North Dakota Game and Fish Department personnel released 18 bighorns in the badlands as part of an effort to reintroduce an animal long absent from the state.

Department Receives \$100,000 for Bighorn Management

Three checks totaling nearly \$100,000 were given to the North Dakota Game and Fish Department in March at the Minnesota-Wisconsin Chapter of the Foundation for North American Wild Sheep annual meeting in Minneapolis.

North Dakota's 2006 bighorn sheep auction license sold for a record \$49,500, an increase of \$6,500 from last year. Along with an annual grant of \$25,000, the Minnesota-Wisconsin conservation group also presented \$23,000 to Game and Fish for two in-state bighorn transplants, and one transplant from Montana, all accomplished last January.

The funds will be used to enhance management of North Dakota's bighorn sheep, said Brett Wiedmann, Department bighorn sheep biologist, Dickinson. "Minnesota-Wisconsin FNAWS continues to be a strong supporter of bighorn sheep management efforts in North Dakota," Wiedmann said. "They see all the gains we have made, and their enthusiasm is reflected on a national level by the interest shown in our auction tag."

Three bidders went all the way up to \$48,000 for the hunting license, Wiedmann said. "It was amazing to see that," he said. "You couldn't help but smile. It is a real indication of how others view our efforts in North Dakota."

The grant and license auction are part of a 10-year agreement, signed in 1999, between the Department and the Minnesota-Wisconsin conservation group.

The total number of bighorn sheep hunting licenses in North Dakota was increased in 2006 from four to six. One was auctioned by Minnesota-Wisconsin FNAWS and five were issued by lottery.

Youth Conservation Camp

The North Dakota Wildlife Federation will hold a youth conservation camp August 6-12 at the Triangle Y Camp near Garrison on Lake Sakakawea. Boys and girls ages 12-16 are invited to participate.

Hands-on activities include firearms safety, archery, dog training, boating, fishing, water ecology, outdoor survival, trapshooting, and soil and range studies.

Cosponsored by the Game and Fish Department, the camp is limited to the first 80 kids registered. Cost is \$200, which covers meals and accommodations. A nonrefundable deposit of \$50 is required for pre-registration and will be credited toward the camp cost. For more information, contact the North Dakota Wildlife Federation at 888-827-2557.

Airboat to the Rescue

Low water levels on North Dakota's Lake Sakakawea have created some inconveniences for boaters, but none more dangerous than a situation that has developed on the upper end of the big lake near Williston.

Within the past couple of years, several boaters and canoeists have become stuck in thick mud covered by shallow water adjacent to the main Missouri River channel. Through a federal grant, the Game and Fish Department and Williams County Sheriff's Department were able to purchase an airboat for river rescues and other enforcement functions.

For 40-plus years since Lake Sakakawea has filled, the Missouri River has been carrying silt that settles to the bottom in the area where the river meets the lake. Estimates are that more than 10 feet of silt has covered the old river channel for a distance of about 20 miles east of where the U.S. Highway 85 bridge crosses the Missouri southwest of Williston.

This delta isn't a problem when water levels are high, but when water is low like it is now, it barely covers the silt. Unknowing boaters who drift into the shallow areas can get stuck, and they can't get out. The mud is several feet thick. "It's more like quicksand," says Game and Fish Department district game warden Jeremy Wentz. "If you step out of a boat you will sink up to roughly your waist."



Williams County Sheriff Scott Busching (left) and game warden Jeremy Wentz operate the airboat shared by the two agencies.

In addition, this area of the Missouri River is somewhat isolated and the nearest shoreline or dwelling is sometimes a mile or more away.

A few years ago, one family spent the night on the water in their canoe after getting stuck off the main river channel. They had to stay in the canoe until late the following afternoon when an airboat owned by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service arrived and was able to reach the family.

Several other difficult rescues were necessary until last summer when the airboat arrived, and it was put to good use twice. "This boat is designed to run in two to six inches of water," said Williams County Sheriff Scott Busching. "That's where it shines."

Because of the potential danger, even with the airboat available, the sheriff's department recommends no boat travel on the Missouri River from Williston downstream for about 25 miles to Lewis and Clark State Park.



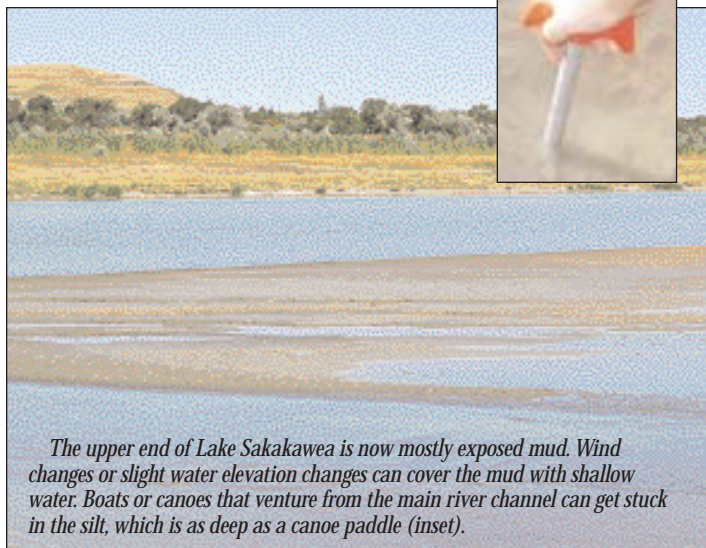
Bismarck Youth Wins Best of Show

A drake canvasback floating on water, titled "The Aristocrat," was chosen the 2006 Best of Show winner in the North Dakota Junior Duck Stamp Contest.

Thomas Dwyer, a 16-year-old high school student from Bismarck, used oil paints to depict a lone male canvasback. His artwork was selected from nearly 600 entries from across North Dakota. Thomas has been competing in the contest since he was 9 years old, and has placed first in his age group each year.

Dwyer's painting will represent North Dakota at the National Junior Duck Stamp Contest. First place winners at the national competition receive a trip to Washington D.C., a \$4,000 cash award, and their entry made into a stamp.

Other first place winners in the four age categories were Noah Christenson and Olivia Christenson, Maxbass; Joseph Dwyer, Bismarck; McKayla Gessner, Newburg; John Guertin, Valley City; Jessica Haag, Fairfield; Jaiden Langlie, Fargo; Brennen Stotts, Lisbon; Brittany Taylor, Grand Forks; and Jade Teske, Westhope.



The upper end of Lake Sakakawea is now mostly exposed mud. Wind changes or slight water elevation changes can cover the mud with shallow water. Boats or canoes that venture from the main river channel can get stuck in the silt, which is as deep as a canoe paddle (inset).



Warden Ken Skuza

WARDEN STORIES

Boat Ramp Blues

By Ken Skuza

From early May through late September I spend a fair amount of time at boat

ramps, checking anglers and their catches, checking boaters for proper registration and safety equipment, and launching and loading our enforcement patrol boat. I've come to believe that if it can happen, it will happen at a ramp, and usually when there is a long line of people waiting.

On a day off several years ago, my dad and I watched four young men drive up to the Totten Trail boat ramp on Lake Sakakawea's east end. They loaded the boat with fishing equipment and coolers and backed down the ramp. Partway through the process, one of them unhooked the boat from the trailer and waved for his buddy to continue to back down.

As they approached the middle of the ramp, the boat started sliding off the trailer, slowly at first, then gaining momentum until it tilted past the halfway point and crashed down on the ramp.

This was followed by a loud screeching sound as the fiberglass boat bottom scraped across the concrete, pushed backward by a vehicle operator who didn't notice the boat had separated from the trailer.

The driver's friends started jumping, running, and screaming until he realized what had taken place. He panicked, put the truck in drive, and drove up into the parking lot, leaving the boat in the middle of the ramp.

This all occurred with 20-30 other boats waiting to launch. It took several of us a half-hour to help the young men put their boat back on the trailer. They left with red faces, a hefty insurance claim to file, and no memories of a relaxing day on the water.

One day while waiting to unload my patrol boat, I watched two men begin cleaning out their tackle boxes on the tailgate of their pickup. They retied lines and had lunch while killing time before their turn. When the time came, they were caught off-guard a bit and abruptly stopped what they were doing to back the boat down.

The first item to spill off the tailgate was their lunch, followed by two very large tackle boxes which were left wide open, followed by rods, reels and the cooler.

Lures, pop, ice, food, bobbers, weights, and many more items spread out behind the truck, both above and below the water line. When the driver realized what was happening and hit the brakes, a tire rolled out of the back of the pickup and into the lake. The ramp looked like a Christmas tree full of decorations.

As I walked down to help, others waiting in line began yelling and screaming at the two men. Instead of helping pick up the gear, I ended up doing crowd control for a rather unpleasant hour.

I've also seen boats sink, trucks and cars roll into the water, people fall off trailers, people fall off docks, and people fight.

On Lake Sakakawea, and just about anywhere else in the state, waiting in line at a ramp is sometimes a necessary part of a trip. Boaters should use that time to make sure everything is ready, so time to get on or off the ramp is minimal. But problems occasionally arise.

If you see someone having problems, try to help them out. Criticism doesn't help the line move any faster, and besides, the next time you go to the boat ramp, you may be the one who needs help.

KEN SKUZA is the Game and Fish Department's district warden stationed at Garrison.



Venturia Youth Wins Earth Day Patch Contest

Mindy Schumacher of Venturia submitted the winning entry in a contest seeking a design for a North Dakota Earth Day patch.

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department celebrates Earth Day each year by sponsoring a youth clean-up day on state-owned or managed lands in April and May, said Jeb Williams, Department outreach biologist. "Each participant involved in cleaning up these public lands during April and May will receive a specifically designed conservation patch," he said.

Winners of the contest – in the three age categories – were Tanner Lind of Rugby (6-9), Mindy Schumacher (10-13) and Tabitha Schumacher of Venturia (14-18). Mindy Schumacher's design will be used on this year's Earth Day patch.

Schools, Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, 4-H clubs or other groups interested in taking part in clean-up activities are asked to call Bill Jensen (328-6637) or Jeb Williams (328-6332) to receive a reporting form for their project.

Groups taking part in clean-up activities should take the following precautions to ensure safety: keep young people away from highways, lakes and rivers; and only allow older participants to pick up broken glass.



GAME AND FISH STAFF NOTES



Agriculture Commissioner Roger Johnson (center) presents the 2006 Weed Control Partner award to Arvid Anderson (left), Game and Fish Department assistant wildlife resource management biologist, and Tony Jacobson (right), U.S. Army Corps of Engineers natural resource specialist. "Arvid and Tony are proven leaders in developing weed control partnerships between government agencies, private landowners, conservation groups and others," Johnson said. "These cooperative efforts have helped ensure the greatest benefit from every dollar spent on weed control." Anderson supervises noxious and invasive weed management on more than 23,000 Game and Fish acres in five counties.

INSTANT LICENSING

Online at gf.nd.gov or by phone
800-406-6409

Most types of Game and Fish licenses and applications are available both online at the Department's website, or over the phone. Online license purchases have no surcharge, while instant licensing over the phone carries a service charge of \$4 for transactions of \$70 or less, and \$10 if the cost is more than \$70.

New Fisheries Manager

Scott Gangl was hired as fisheries management section leader for the Game and Fish Department in March.

A native of St. Anthony, North Dakota, Gangl spent the last six years working with Wyoming Game and Fish in fisheries research and management.

He received a bachelor's degree in wildlife and fisheries sciences from South Dakota State University, and a master's degree from the University of Minnesota.



Scott Gangl



With Radio Host Doug Leier,
Game and Fish Outreach Biologist
Saturdays - 11 a.m. (10 a.m. mountain time)

on the following ND Clear Channel radio network stations:

- KFGO-AM 790, Fargo •KKXL-AM 1440, Grand Forks
- KCJB-AM 910, Minot
- KLTC-AM 1460, Dickinson •KFYR-AM 550, Bismarck
- KFAN-AM 1130, Twin Cities, Saturdays at 5 a.m.

(Tape delay from previous week)

Join Doug and guests for news and conversation that embraces everyone with an interest in North Dakota's Outdoors.

